

Pure Poison:

The Gothic Femme Fatale in Japanese Horror Cinema

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Introduction

Though they may not have initially been called by that name, Gothic tropes have existed in Japanese literature almost since its inception. Stories of antiquated and haunted spaces, specters of the past that take the form of some sort of ghost or monster, and / or a conflict between modern rationalism and belief in the supernatural are plentiful in the realm of folk tales and both high and low literature. Though the Japanese Gothic's specific connections to religion and cultural norms may differ from their English-language counterparts, many of the themes, story arcs, and character types are similar. One recurring Gothic motif in Japanese literature and film is the femme fatale — usually a sexually alluring woman who leads men to their deaths, and whose existence serves as a grim reminder of what happens to those who stray from Buddhist principles of asceticism.

In Takashi Miike's 1999 film *Ôdishon* (*Audition*), we see a version of the Gothic femme fatale who embodies the contradictions of both the Gothic itself and Japan's long history of depicting vengeful female characters who represent both an idealized version of femininity and a threat to the social order. She is Asami, a young, delicate, soft-spoken woman who seems to be the ideal spouse for the older Aoyama, who sees her as emblematic of an idealized past. Ultimately, though, she reveals herself to be a psychopath, and the final scene of the film is a gruesome scene of torture in which she drugs Aoyama, penetrates him

with needles, and cuts off his feet with razor wire. This paper will examine the significance of the femme fatale character, and the Japanese femme fatale specifically, through *Audition*'s portrayal of Asami. In doing so, I hope to reveal the ways that the character both adheres to certain Gothic conventions surrounding female sexuality and the grotesque while also breaking new ground as a character who uses idealized male visions of femininity and purity — rather than the promise of strings-free sex — as a tool of vengeance.

1.0 The Gothic in Fiction and Film

It is generally agreed that the first work of Gothic fiction was Horace Walpole's 1764 novel *The Castle of Otranto*, the story of a virginal young princess pursued by an older man set against the backdrop of a castle and an ancient prophecy. After *Otranto*, Jerrold E. Hogle writes, Gothic fiction would “explode” in the 1790s and remain popular through the early 1830s (Hogle 2002, 1). Though the “pure” Gothic novel or film has become a rarity, Gothic elements still pervade many popular novels, comic books, television shows, and films, particularly in the horror genre.

Given that the Gothic represents “an uneasy conflation of genres, styles, and conflicted cultural concerns” (Hogle 2), it can be difficult to pin down exactly what constitutes a Gothic story. Some elements, though, repeat frequently: ancient spaces like castles or crypts, virginal women in danger, hidden secrets from the past, ghosts or monsters, a focus on innocence and its potential corruption (usually through sex), and a conflict between reason and the supernatural, often represented in some sort of battle between a scientist / doctor and a supernatural force. Like the horror genre, with which it is so frequently entwined (especially in film), Gothic stories allow audiences and readers to explore taboo subjects like sex and race from a safe vantage point, because those issues are depicted through the less familiar imagery of monsters and the supernatural.

The earliest Gothic films such as *Nosferatu* (1922), *Dracula* (1931),

and *Frankenstein* (1931) were often based on Gothic novels. In recent decades, though, Gothic elements have crept into stories set in the present (*The Haunting*, 1963) and even the distant future (*Alien*, 1979). Mari Kotani describes “techno-Gothic,” a term she first heard from the novelist William Gibson, as encompassing films like *The Matrix* (1999) and Mamoru Oshii’s *Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence* (2004), which mix Gothic themes with cyberpunk and questions of what it means to be human in an increasingly digitized world (Kotani 2005, 13–14). Modern films may mix Gothic details with sci-fi, drama, and horror (or even comedy), but some films, like Guillermo del Toro’s *Crimson Peak* (2015), fully embrace the Gothic mode.¹

2.0 Women and the Japanese Gothic

Given the genre’s strong ties to Judeo-Christian notions of purity and sin, is it possible to apply the term “Gothic” to literature and film produced in East Asia? Charles Shiro Inouye, writing on the work of Izumi Kyōka, a Japanese writer often connected to the Gothic, was skeptical that the term “Gothic” could be applied beyond English-language literature (though he titled his own 1996 volume of Kyōka translations *Japanese Gothic Tales*) (Inouye 1996). For H. J. Hughes, though, “...the Japanese Gothic shares with the West its subversion of religious and social norms, an obsession with sex and death, and a fear of the supernatural or unknown. These are human qualities, not the province of one culture” (Hughes 2000, 60). I would agree that the Gothic is a universal genre inasmuch as concerns about religion, gender, and the conflict between tradition / modernity and reason / superstition are universal concerns. Japan’s Gothic traditions may have their foundations in Buddhism and folk tales rather than in novels like *The Castle of Otranto*, but the tensions at their heart, as well as the characters and tropes that occur with great frequency, are not so different from those found in English-language Gothic stories.²

One trope that appears quite frequently in Japanese Gothic fiction and film is that of the Gothic femme fatale, a female character presented

as simultaneously alluring and dangerous because of her sexuality (usually a sexuality that exists outside traditional social norms concerning female virtue and submissiveness). This depiction of women in Japanese literature as lustful, vengeful, duplicitous, and dangerous to men wishing to live a virtuous life arguably has its roots in Buddhist ideology, particularly an oft-quoted sutra passage that reads “Women are the emissaries of hell; they cut off forever the seed of buddhahood. On the outside they have the faces of bodhisattvas, but on the inside they have the hearts of demons” (Moerman 2009, 352). Interestingly, as D. Max Moerman points out, this passage is nowhere to be found in Buddhist scriptures, but it is attributed to various sutras by the likes of Taira no Yasuyori, Nichiren, and Zonkaku. Regardless of whether it exists or not, the sentiment clearly penetrated the national mindset. Early depictions of the Gothic femme fatale usually imagine her as lustful and duplicitous, tempting men through their desires (the root of all suffering in Buddhism), and then giving them a chance to redeem themselves when they resist and return to a virtuous life.

The Tale of Genji’s Lady Rokujo, with her obsessive jealousy and supernatural ability to kill Genji’s lovers after she is abandoned by him, is often described as the prototypical Japanese femme fatale (Ancuta 2013). Another early depiction of this character occurs in the 12th century *Konjaku monogatari* (*The Tale of Konjaku*), in its story of Rasetsukoku, an island of lustful women who lure men into their clutches and then slowly consume them. First depicted as a horrifying place, its position in literature gradually shifted “until what was once a land of demons south of India was rediscovered as an erotic paradise south of Japan” (Moerman 2009, 352). In the 17th century *Kōshoku ichidai otoko* (*The Life of an Amorous Man*), Ihara Saikaku depicts the island as “the final frontier of sex tourism,” telling the story of a group of men venturing off to the island loaded down with hundreds of sex toys, happily sailing off to their deaths if it means experiencing an extended period of debauchery first (370).

The Gothic femme fatale also makes frequent appearances in folk tales and *kaidan-shū*, or “strange stories.” Ueda Akinari’s 18th century

Ugetsu monogatari (*Tales of Moonlight and Rain*) includes the story “Jasei no in” (“The Lust of the White Serpent”), about a snake-demon who takes the form of a beautiful woman and seduces the male protagonist. Different regional folk legends also tell the story of a *yuki onna*, or “snow woman,” who in the most famous version of the story appears during a snowstorm and kills a man by breathing on him. The 19th century kabuki play *Yotsuya kaidan* (*Yotsuya Ghost Story*), adapted many times for stage and film, tells the story of the ghost of a vengeful woman with a scarred face who murders her husband’s young lover and eventually drives him mad.

One writer strongly associated with the femme fatale is the aforementioned Izumi Kyōka, whose stories often depict strange, alluring women who were “inextricably linked with death” and “inseparable from a Meiji/Taisho construct of a masculine subject as the norm and the concurrent crafting of the female as Other with naturalized access to a domain at once maternalized and abjected” (Cornyetz 1999, 22). Charles Shiro Inouye argues that Kyōka’s heroines “both seduce and save, tempt and chasten Kyōka’s male characters” (Inouye 1996, 3). In “Kōya hijiri” (“The Holy Man of Mount Kōya”), a monk is tempted by a beautiful enchantress who turns the men she seduces into animals, but he manages to resist her charms and return to a virtuous life. In one scene, the woman and the monk bathe near a waterfall that is alternately described as beautiful and terrifying (similar to the way that descriptions of the woman shift between alluring and terrifying). Inouye argues that the waterfall scene “aestheticize(s) the violent aspect of the erotic, imagining both the woman and nature itself as simultaneously beautiful and deadly” (173).

Nina Cornyetz notes that in the postwar period, the “dangerous woman” character shifted from the periphery to the center in the works of authors like Enchi Fumiko, becoming “a site for rethinking female identity, empowerment, and erotic agency” (Cornyetz 1999, 16). In stories like *Onnamen* (*Masks*) and *Onnazaka* (*The Waiting Years*), “the dangerous woman is not only spatially shifted from periphery to center, she is imagined to reside in latent form inside all women” (16). Where

women like Kyōka's enchantresses had existed "off the beaten track, folded into mountain interiors" (16), women like the protagonists in Enchi's stories were a part of the modern, physical world, exacting their revenge through less supernatural means and raising questions about female suffering and oppression at the hands of men.

20th century Japanese film versions of the femme fatale have tended to draw on images and characters from pre-modern Japanese literature. Mizoguchi Kenji's *Ugetsu* (1953) combines two stories from Ueda Akinari's *Ugetsu Monogatari*, "The Lust of the White Serpent" and "Asaji ga yado" ("The House Amid the Thickets") to tell the story of a lowly farmer who is seduced by the spirit of a beautiful woman, Lady Wakasa, but ultimately returns home to the dutiful wife he left behind. Masaki Kobayashi's *Kwaidan* (1965), based on Lafcadio Hearn's collection of Japanese ghost stories, tells perhaps the most famous version of the "snow woman" story, imagining her as both beautiful and deadly. In Shindo Kaneto's *Yabu no naka no Kuroneko* (*A Black Cat in a Bamboo Grove*), based on a folk tale, the vengeful ghosts of a mother and daughter lure unsuspecting samurai into their home, seducing them and then murdering them.

Looking at hundreds of years of literary, folkloric, and filmic history, then, we can identify certain common features among the many depictions of the Gothic femme fatale in Japan. Until the postwar period, these characters tend to exist as "other," their sexual assertiveness and beauty presented as the antithesis of the dutiful wife and mother. Triumph over them often teaches the lesson that a hedonistic life lived only in the pursuit of pleasure will lead one to a bad end. At the root of this is the Buddhist / Confucian belief that women are inherently unclean and dangerous. Female sexuality is almost always linked with death, a merging of eros and thanatos commonly found in Gothic stories. These women tend to have supernatural powers or exist as spirits / ghosts, emphasizing the mysteriousness and unknowability of women. Finally, they exist to set up a contrast between the modern, rational world and a mysterious *tasogare* (twilight) world (to use Kyōka's term), with the former being associated with modernity and

the latter with a backward, irrational past. This too recalls Gothic stories like *Frankenstein* and *Dracula*, in which the Gothic monster stands at the crossroads of superstition and science, the uncertain past and the rational future.

In the postwar period, though, I would agree with Nina Cornyetz that the depiction of the Gothic femme fatale shifts — she is still often duplicitous and vengeful, but she is more normalized, more sympathetic, and generally not depicted as a ghost or a monster with supernatural powers. As with so many recent depictions of classic horror characters and tropes, recent depictions of the Gothic femme fatale exist in a “metaverse” in which the characters and the film / story itself seem to be much more self-aware. The character may be drawing on her own knowledge of male fantasies and fictional depictions of women, while the film / story may also include a lot of knowing asides to an audience that it presumes to be in on the joke.

3.0 The Femme Fatale Games the System: *Audition*

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, Japanese horror films experienced a brief boom period in which movies like *Ringu* (*The Ring*, 1998), and *Ju-on* (*The Grudge*, 2002), enjoyed considerable domestic and international success, while films by directors like Kiyoshi Kurosawa and Takashi Miike received a great deal of attention at film festivals. Many of these films featured vengeful female characters that physically resembled the female characters in films like *Ugetsu* and *A Black Cat in a Bamboo Grove*, but the sexual element was mostly removed. In films like *The Ring*, *The Grudge*, *Honogurai mizu no soko kara* (*Dark Water*, 2002), *Chakushin ari* (*One Missed Call*, 2003), and *Shibuya kaidan* (*Shibuya Ghost Story*, 2004), characters are terrorized mostly by female children and adolescents, many of them with long black hair. The most famous of these is Sadako, whose white dress, long black hair, and single, staring eye make her resemble an *onryō*, a vengeful female ghost from Japanese folklore. With their female child-villains and female protagonists, these films raised questions about motherhood and the

breakdown of the family unit in Japan, often portraying mother characters sympathetically and at the same time shaming them for not being more devoted to their children.³

Takashi Miike's 1999 film *Audition* stands out from the J-horror boom crowd for a variety of reasons. For one, it's shockingly violent (festival screenings are rumored to have triggered walkouts, though this may have been exaggerated). For another, all of its main characters are adults, and the central female character is beautiful and sexually alluring, something decidedly absent from other J-horror films (where most of the female villains were children or adolescents). There is also no clear supernatural element — the female character is mysterious, but she does not seem to be a ghost or to have any sort of supernatural powers.

Based on the novel of the same name by Murakami Ryū, *Audition* tells the story of widower Aoyama, who decides, seven years after the death of his wife, that he is ready to get married again. His colleague Yoshikawa, a film producer, has an unusual solution: they will stage a fake audition for a lead actress in a movie, and Aoyama can make his choice of wife from a large pool of attractive women. Before the audition, he is immediately drawn to the photo and resume of Asami, and becomes even more enamored of her when he meets her during the audition. She is a former ballerina: beautiful, petite, soft-spoken, young, and refined, exactly what the very old-fashioned Aoyama is looking for in a wife. Yoshikawa is suspicious when he can't track down any of her references, but Aoyama pursues her anyway, eventually taking her to a seaside hotel where he plans to propose marriage. But she disappears the following morning, and as he searches for her he learns disturbing things about her past. In the final act of the film, Asami breaks into Aoyama's home and finds a picture of his dead wife. Enraged, she drugs his drink and tortures him with needles and razor wire, saying that she is doing it because he has failed to love only her. The film ends with Aoyama's son returning home and killing Asami by throwing her down the stairs.

Audition upends the conventions of both horror films and Japanese

Gothic stories in a variety of ways. Where English-language slasher films traditionally feature men terrorizing women, *Audition* shows us a woman terrorizing men. Her sadism is made all the more unsettling by the fact that she maintains her delicate, hyper-feminine demeanor throughout the film's final act, never "masculinizing" in the manner of so many female slasher protagonists when they finally take their vengeance on a villain at the end of the film.⁴ *Audition* is also famously not structured like a horror film — the first forty minutes feel like a romantic comedy, and there is no hint of the violence and disturbing imagery that will follow. The character of Asami is clearly influenced by Japanese Gothic femme fatales who have come before: she almost always dresses in white, she has long black hair, and though she is not an evil spirit or ghost there is something otherworldly about her. At the same time, there is a key difference. Where women like the inhabitants of Rasetasukoku, Kyōka's enchantresses, and Lady Wakasa of *Ugetsu* drew men in with their lustful appetites, Asami is appealing to Aoyama because she seems virginal, childlike, and "pure." He doesn't see her as a transgression or an illicit temptation, he sees her as an ideal partner (though a conventionally beautiful one). In this way, the film effectively merges two Gothic character types — the innocent virgin and the deadly beauty — into one, though initially Asami seems to be only the former.

From the moment we first see Asami, everything about her seems carefully crafted to appeal to a man like Aoyama. His first sighting of her in the flesh is from behind — she is reading a book, her hair hiding her face. When she enters the audition room she also has her head down, and her eyes remain lowered in almost every scene that she has with Aoyama. The other women who have shown up for the audition come across as mostly rough and uncouth, dressed in revealing outfits and using casual language. Asami, by contrast, is dressed conservatively, all in white, and speaks just above a whisper, using very feminine, polite language. As she speaks in that first meeting, the camera is positioned behind her, and it slowly zooms in on a smitten Aoyama, who can't take his eyes off of her. In these initial scenes, there is

nothing to indicate that she is dangerous — she is costumed, framed, and lit to be appealing to Aoyama (and by extension to the heterosexual male audience members).

About forty minutes into the film, though, we get the first hint that Asami is not what she seems. Aoyama calls Asami at home after several days, and as the phone rings, we see Asami sitting in her barren, run-down apartment, the phone on the floor, a large bag in the corner. Again, she is seated with her hair hiding her face. As the phone rings, though, the camera zooms in on her mouth, and we see her smile very slowly. This is the moment when the film officially shifts from a sort of romantic comedy-drama to a horror film. Where previously all the film's settings have been bland or familiar, Asami's apartment is darkly lit, cramped, and decrepit-looking. With that one shot of her smile, Asami the character also transforms from guileless and childlike to calculating and in control. It's a smile that says she knows her ruse has worked. In the presence of Aoyama, though, she remains docile and sweet, presenting reasonably convincing excuses for why the references on her resume didn't check out. Aoyama continues to see her and eventually takes her to a seaside hotel, where she demurely undresses for him and hides her body under the bedsheets, then removes the sheets and tells him to look at her, noting the scars on her legs and saying "I want you to know everything about me." Before she has sex with him, though, she makes him promise that he will love only her. He agrees, and she says that other men have said that to her, but she thinks that Aoyama will be the one who's different.

When he leans down to kiss her, something bizarre happens. There's a loud noise, and the camera cuts unexpectedly to the next morning, with Aoyama lying naked and alone in bed. When the front desk calls and tells him that Asami has left, he is disoriented and out of breath. Asami seems to have magically disappeared, and Aoyama seems either drugged or under some kind of spell. These jarring and unexpected cuts will continue until the end of the film, with a realistic scene suddenly being interrupted by an image of a dismembered body part or a dream-like image of Aoyama's dead wife. Having pulled the

rug out from under the audience after initially presenting itself as a romantic comedy, the film seems determined to keep its viewers on edge.

In the film's final twenty minutes, we watch Asami brutally torture Aoyama with needles and carefully sever his limbs with razor wire. She has snuck into his home and drugged his drink after being enraged by a photo of his dead wife, which she sees as a betrayal of his promise to "love only her." (This realization happens long after she has disappeared from the seaside hotel, though, and we never learn exactly what prompted her to leave Aoyama so suddenly at that time.) Beyond its graphic imagery, what makes this scene particularly unnerving is the fact that Asami remains delicate and feminine throughout, her voice every bit as breathy and childlike as it was during her dates with Aoyama, but now dryly commenting on the fact that she's removing his feet. As she inserts needles into his body, she repeatedly says "kiri-kiri-kiri," roughly translated as "sticky-sticky-stick," a type of language normally used among children or women trying to affect a hyper-feminine, childlike persona. It is this aspect of Asami's character — this betrayal of expectations surrounding the portrayal of a petite, feminine woman — that makes the film particularly terrifying.

Indeed, the film and the novel that it's based on have led to quite a bit of speculation about whether *Audition* is inherently feminist or misogynist, and whether it contains a critique of Japan's patriarchal culture or simply exploits its female characters. Elvis Mitchell of *The New York Times* argued that the movie's theme was "the objectification of women in Japanese society and the mirror-image horror of retribution it could create" (Mitchell 2001). Tom Mes and Jasper Sharp argue that reviews like this are "misreading" the film, adding that Miike himself "denies that any such social aspect is to be found in his work" (Mes and Sharp 2005, 194). While a lack of intention on the part of the director does not automatically mean that a film contains no social commentary, I would argue that *Audition* ultimately comes across as ambiguous in its attitudes toward its male and female characters, and to classify it as inherently misogynist *or* an explicit takedown of the patriarchal

order seems to be an oversimplification. For one thing, it's difficult to know who we're supposed to sympathize with / vilify. In a change that seems common in Japanese novel-to-film or manga-to-film adaptations, the character of Aoyama is decidedly less sympathetic in Murakami's novel. He admits to having had many affairs while married and wonders "What husband has never speculated how free he might feel if his wife were suddenly out of the picture?" (Boddy 2009). The film version of Aoyama, though certainly possessing a view of women that's based in sexism, does not come across as inherently unsympathetic, and certainly not morally repugnant. It's thus difficult to read the film as some sort of indictment of the patriarchy, with Asami as an avenging angel and Aoyama as a representation of sexist oppression. Aoyama's only "crime," in Asami's eyes, is loving his dead wife, which hardly makes him deserving of torture and mutilation. If *Audition* were more of a standard "female revenge" horror film, Aoyama might have caused Asami terrible trauma through rape or physical / mental abuse, and we would thus be made to sympathize with her as she exacted her revenge. Ultimately, though, the film is much more ambiguous in its sense of who we are supposed to identify / sympathize with, though in the final act of the film Aoyama is clearly the victim and Asami has become a monster.

The film's overall treatment of female characters also comes across as simultaneously exploitative and sensitive. In the "audition" scene, the audience is clearly meant to identify with the two men, watching the mostly-forgettable women preen for the camera and occasionally disrobe. The characterization of Asami also plays on the stereotype of beautiful women as inherently duplicitous, crazy, and dangerous — devourers whose only goal in life is to ensnare men and make them suffer. But Asami is also given a somewhat sympathetic back story (she was abused horrifically as a child). Finally, in making Asami delicate and hyper-feminine, an idealized fantasy that is surely alluring to many heterosexual male audience members, and then revealing that persona to be a ruse that results in horrific violence, the film seems to be performing a kind of bait and switch. Like Aoyama, straight male

audience members are likely drawn to Asami, which makes her eventual torture of Aoyama — while still maintaining the delicate, feminine qualities that they find alluring — all the more unsettling. The film seems to be initially presenting a worldview that “traditional” men could identify with — but then it pulls the rug out from under them, revealing that worldview to be illusory and dangerous.

Conclusion

Audition is a film with classic Gothic elements: an obsession with female purity, a character with dark secrets, the hint of something supernatural or otherworldly (even if the film lacks characters who are clearly ghosts or monsters), and a lingering focus on cruelty and suffering. Its main female character also merges two Gothic character types: the virginal love interest and the beautiful, sexually available woman who tempts an otherwise rational man toward danger. As I hope I have illustrated, though, *Audition* tweaks the Gothic formula in several ways, most importantly by having its female character tempt its male character not with the promise of otherworldly, strings-free sex, but with the promise of an idealized, traditional past. Everything about Asami is a carefully constructed lure meant to entrap a man like Aoyama, a man with a sadly anachronistic vision of idealized femininity. This becomes especially clear as Asami lies dying on the floor of Aoyama’s home, her neck broken from the fall down the stairs. She smiles at him and repeats the words she said to him on one of their dates, still speaking in a delicate, feminine tone: “I’m so glad to have found someone to help me. I’ve been alone so long, it’s great to have an adult that I can talk to. It’s the first time I’ve met someone like you, someone warm who really understands my feelings.” The juxtaposition of the words, her smiling face, and the fact that both of them are now lying mutilated and bloody on the floor underscores the meaninglessness of those words and the way she simply told Aoyama exactly what he wanted to hear from an ideal wife. As she lies dying, her words and her persona are revealed to be hollow, purely a performance that she put on to gain power over him.

In recognizing the specific vision of femininity that a man like Aoyama would be drawn to and performing that femininity to deceive him, Asami joins the ranks of a host of contemporary fictional and semi-fictional femme fatale characters who appear to be “gaming the system.” These women exist in a kind of metaverse in which they’re well aware of which qualities make them most appealing to men and are happy to play up those qualities to gain some sort of advantage. In the 2015 film *Ex Machina*, the robot Ava, a sort of techno-femme fatale, uses her extensive knowledge of the male protagonist and male preferences in general to present herself as helpless, childlike, and uncertain, bringing out his protector / rescuer instincts so that he frees her from the home where she is being held and allows her to kill her captor / creator. In the end, though, she abandons the protagonist to a likely death, and we see that her persona was a ruse — she played the damsel in distress in order to achieve freedom. A similar quality can be found in Japanese idol culture, in which young women, in the hopes of gaining more fans and thus more financial support, play up their childlike nature, cuteness, and hyper-femininity in order to squeeze more money out of their mostly male fans. Both fans and idols frequently admit that they’re well aware of how the game is being played but are happy to maintain the illusion, even if, for the fan, it means spending large amounts of money.

Though there are occasional hints that she is not of this world, Asami is also an example of the shift that Nina Cornyetz describes for Japanese “dangerous women” characters in the twentieth century — a shift from periphery to center. Asami is not an enchantress — she exists very much within Aoyama’s world and appeals to him as a means to build a very ordinary, everyday life. As I’ve argued, the question of whether her portrayal is inherently misogynist / feminist is difficult to determine, but in moving its femme fatale out of the shadows and into the light, *Audition* does achieve a more visceral form of terror, if only in presenting the audience with a delicate-but-dangerous woman who is not the stuff of ghost stories and ancient folk tales. Instead, she’s the girl sitting across from you at dinner who seems to embody an idealiz-

ed, patriarchal version of femininity -- which is, of course, too good to be true.

Notes

- 1 Films that fully embrace the Gothic mode are a harder sell these days, which might explain why the trailer for *Crimson Peak* presented it more as a horror film, leading some audience members to express disappointment that it was really a Gothic romance (and not very scary). See Katie Rife, "Guillermo Del Toro's *Crimson Peak* is gorgeous, tragic, and not very scary," *The A. V. Club* (2015), <https://film.avclub.com/guillermo-del-toro-s-crimson-peak-is-gorgeous-tragic-1798185210>.
- 2 The presenters and organizers at the 2018 "Gothic In Japan" symposium at Nagoya University (where this paper was first presented) seemed to have little doubt that "Gothic" was a concept that could be applied to Japanese media. <https://www.alexwatson.info/gothic-in-japan>
- 3 For more on the depiction of motherhood in Japanese horror films, see Ruth Goldberg's "Demons in the Family: Tracking the Japanese 'Uncanny Mother Film' from *A Page of Madness* to *Ringu*" in *Planks of Reason: Essays on the Horror Film* (2004).
- 4 For more on the trope of "final girls" in horror films and their tendency to be more masculine, see Carol Clover's *Men, Women, and Chain Saws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* (1992).

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